



ERIC WHITACRE'S
VIRTUAL SCHOOL

THE BEAUTIFUL MESS

MASTERCLASS
IN COMPOSITION & CREATIVITY

Educational Resources

Teacher & Student Guides (All Chapters) – Curiosity Edition

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BEAUTIFUL MESS

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In this introductory video, Eric recounts his journey to becoming a composer. He talks about his childhood career ambitions, teen interest in computers, pop music and technology, and the “lightbulb” moment when he first sang in his college choir. He compares the process of computer coding to the process of composing a piece of music and meticulously notating the musical elements so they can be recreated by the performer.

This guide leads the student through the video with a series of guided questions, insights, and artistic/musical concepts to help create meaningful understandings about Eric’s approach to music. The activities included are designed to introduce students to the composer Eric Whitacre and help them relate to the creative process involved in composing. Students will also reflect on their own creative pursuits and how those experiences impact their lives.

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- Baseball player, ninja, dungeon master (Eric’s childhood career ambitions)
- Commodore 64 computer (Eric’s first computer and the beginning of his experience with coding and gaming)
- Mozart’s *Requiem* (The “lightbulb” moment when Eric joined his college choir and was profoundly moved by the emotional experience of the sounds around him)
- *Go, Lovely Rose* (Eric’s first composition, written for his college choir director and mentor)

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

After viewing, the questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Observing the world around you

See specific instructions in the Student Guide. This activity will encourage students to use all their senses to observe the world around them and later, to turn those observations into a visual representation of those sights, sounds, and feels.

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this segment, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BEAUTIFUL MESS

Student Guide



Introduction

In this opening video, Eric tells his story of how he came to be a composer through a non-traditional path. As you view, you may evaluate your own pre-existing ideas about the topic.

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Baseball player, ninja, dungeon master
Commodore 64 computer
Mozart *Requiem*
Go, Lovely Rose

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

As a young child, what career(s) appealed to you? How have your goals changed since then?

Eric's first experience in a large college choir affected him profoundly. What experience(s) have you had that affected you profoundly?

What are some of your creative pursuits? Why do you think you are drawn to these types of activities?

Explore the World Around You

1. With only pencil and paper, no electronic devices, go somewhere alone. Over a 10-minute period, sit or stand quietly and observe within a radius of three to five feet, everything that your senses tell you. Write it all down.
2. Did you notice more things than you usually would have? Why or why not?
3. Did anything surprise you? Did you have any particular feelings about what your senses were telling you?
4. If your observations were to be transformed into music, what would be the mood of your composition? Would it be loud or soft? Smooth or choppy? High sounds or low sounds? Complex or simple?
5. Turn your written observations into a picture or diagram.
6. Consider sharing your picture/diagram with someone else. Let them ask you questions. Share the written list with that person and explain how you thought of what to draw and write.
7. For a real challenge, on a different day, expand your picture/diagram into a poem, story, or song. Does it retain the same sensory mood that you noticed when you first created it? Do you feel more open to creativity than you did at first?

Reflection and Insights

When interacting with this activity, did it happen like you expected? Was there anything that surprised you or did you learn anything you didn't expect? Explain your answer.

If you did this exploration activity again, what would you do differently, if anything?

How would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests?

CHAPTER 1: A SNAKE WEARING PANTS

Getting Color on the Blank Page

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In this lesson, Eric relates a story of how his 5-year old son's drawing of a "snake wearing pants" helped him discover the process of creating a Style Sheet prior to writing music. This process helps him encourage creative thinking by getting his ideas on the page without judgment and "free from the tyranny of detail."

This lesson leads the student through the video with a series of exercises, questions, and compositional prompts intended to reinforce the musical concepts presented. The activities included are designed to help students focus on the ideas expressed and to help students reflect and experience the process of creativity by developing a Style Sheet of their own.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Equus*: <https://youtu.be/EiiJxpJuCsA>
- *A Boy and a Girl*: https://youtu.be/j_AMI0vRqF8
- *When David Heard*: <https://youtu.be/AwFACXDoOiY>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- "Snake wearing pants" (Eric's son's drawing which led him to the creative process of developing a Style Sheet)
- Style Sheet (Words, pictures, diagrams, and other elements to allow imagination and creativity to flow on a particular idea, word or concept)
- *Equus* ("Horse" in Latin; Eric describes how the word inspired elements of the composition that eventually emerged)
- "Free from the tyranny of detail" (The concept of creativity without judgment; ideas and creative direction that may emerge before a single note of music is written)

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

After viewing, the questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Create a Style Sheet

See specific instructions in the Student Guide. This activity will allow students to create a style sheet to explore an idea or concept of their own choosing. No grade or judgment should be applied to the activity. If desired, students may share their Style Sheet with the group and explain (as Eric did) how it applies to their idea/concept.

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this lesson, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTER 1: A SNAKE WEARING PANTS

Getting Color on the Blank Page

Student Guide



Introduction

This video will help you gain some insight into Eric’s approach for starting a creative project or idea. You will explore some ways that you can begin to visualize a new project or creative idea using the “snake wearing pants” Style Sheet method.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Equus*: <https://youtu.be/EiiJxpJuCsA>
- *A Boy and a Girl*: https://youtu.be/j_AMI0vRqF8
- *When David Heard*: <https://youtu.be/AwFACXDoOiY>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

“Snake wearing pants”

Style Sheet

Equus

“Free from the tyranny of detail”

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

Why do you think starting a new project can be terrifying, especially when you are staring at a blank screen or piece of paper?

Why is filling the paper with color and getting a project going a good idea? When have you done this with a project or idea?

The great artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) is quoted as saying: “All children are born artists, the problem is to remain an artist as we grow up.” What do you think Picasso means by this? How does this relate to you as a curious learner?

Are you comfortable searching for an answer to a question that has more than one right answer?

What does it mean to be a creative person? Do you consider yourself to be a creative person? Why or why not?

Create a Style Sheet

1. You don't need to be a composer to explore the creative process. Get a big piece of blank paper and a pencil, pen or colored markers to create your own Style Sheet.
2. Brainstorm ideas or concepts that inspire you or that you would like to explore.
3. Choose an idea or concept from your brainstorm. Write the word or draw a picture representing the word. (Don't worry if you can't think of anything right away.)
4. If you wrote a word, add a simple picture that goes with the word. If you drew a picture, write the word that you think goes with the picture.
5. Pause and think about your idea. Add new or related ideas, words or pictures that come into your mind in any creative way you would like. Use colors, shapes, words or anything that inspires you. As Eric says, "just move" through the process. Fill up the page with your ideas. Don't judge your work, but let it be what it will be.
6. After you have filled the page with even more words, images, colors, and ideas, pause again and just observe what you have created. Be silent. Look. Clear your mind. Do these ideas and images make sense together, or do you need more to express your idea? Add anything that you're inspired to add. Decide when it feels completed for the time being. Let your intuition guide you and see if you can feel when it's done.
7. Share your Style Sheet with someone else and see if they can get a feel for what you have created. Let them ask you questions. Explain how you thought of what to draw and write. Help them understand why you are interested in the subject, and how you decided to include the elements that you did into the Style Sheet. Don't let anyone tell you you did it wrong if you feel you did it creatively. Try to be "free from a sense of judgment" if possible.
8. On a different day, look again at the Style Sheet and just let it speak to your intuitive senses. Does it inspire you to think about the subject in a way that pleases or intrigues you in some way? Do you feel closer to the idea because of the time you spent thinking and creating? Explain your thoughts and opinions.

Reflection and Insights

Did you find the Style Sheet exercise easy or hard for you? Was it fun or challenging? Explain your answers.

Did this process make you more curious or less curious about the topic you explored, or was there no change? Why, or why not?

Would you do this process again for another topic or idea? Explain your thinking.

Does the process of being creative through the Style Sheet activity inspire you to pursue anything further? Describe your ideas or explain your final thoughts about the process, and what you may have learned by doing it.

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

CHAPTER 2: EMOTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Planning the Journey

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In this lesson, Eric describes his process for creating “Emotional Architecture,” or the emotional and structural shape of the composition. This can include visual representation of sounds, themes, and the overall direction of the work in broad form.

This lesson will help students gain insight into Eric’s approach for creating what he calls Emotional Architecture. The activities included in the Student Guide are designed to help students focus on the ideas expressed, and help them reflect and experience the process of creativity by developing a structure of ideas and concepts for their creative work.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Here are some key words and concepts that Eric explores in Chapter 2: Emotional Architecture. Discuss after viewing the video.

- **“Tone Cluster”** (A musical chord comprising at least three adjacent tones in a scale. Prototypical tone clusters are based on the chromatic scale and are separated by semitones. For instance, three adjacent piano keys struck simultaneously produce a tone cluster.)
- **Hamilton** (A Broadway musical by Lin-Manuel Miranda about Alexander Hamilton, one of America’s founding fathers. It includes the musical influences of traditional musical theatre as well as hip hop, R&B, pop, and soul styles.)
- **Emotional Architecture** (The emotional and transformational journey that Eric wants his audience, performers, and conductors to go on when experiencing his composition. It also functions as a compositional anchor for him, the composer, in developing the work.)
- **The Hubble Space Telescope** (A space telescope launched into low Earth orbit in 1990.)
- **Deep Field** (A musical work composed by Eric in 2015 for orchestra, choir, and smartphones.)
- **Audiation** (The act of hearing or imagining music or sounds in your head.)
- **Musical Motive** (A short musical phrase, a salient recurring figure, musical fragment, or succession of notes that has some special importance in or is characteristic of a composition.)

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery, and Insight

After viewing, the questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly and share ideas without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Create Emotional Architecture

See specific instructions in the Student Guide. This activity will help students explore Emotional Architecture through creating a “mood board” and Emotional Architecture Map, and sharing it with others.

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this lesson, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTER 2: EMOTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Planning the Journey

Student Guide



Introduction

This lesson will help you gain insight into Eric’s approach for structuring the emotional journey that his audience will experience, and it will demonstrate how he prepares an emotional “anchor” for his own compositional process. You will explore similar ways to understand “Emotional Architecture” which may help you interpret other works of art.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

“Tone Cluster”

Hamilton

Emotional Architecture

The Hubble Space Telescope

Deep Field

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

Have you ever thought about how incredibly large the universe is, or is this the first time you have thought about it? What are some descriptive words that you think could begin to describe the vastness of space and the universe?

Eric says “Music is about communication. It’s about reaching out to that audience member, that listener, that performer and speaking with them on a deep, wordless, intuitive level.” What do you think he means by this, and do you agree that music can communicate in these ways? Why, or why not?

Frank R. Barnard wrote that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” In your opinion do images evoke ideas better than the written word, or do words communicate better than images? Explain your answer.

Explore Emotional Architecture

1. Brainstorm and write down words that you think begin to describe how large the universe is (or something else that when you think about fills you with curiosity, awe, and wonder). Do any of these words come close to describing the vastness of space in your opinion (if space was your topic), or do they all fall short somehow? Which words are your favorites as they connect to the idea you are exploring? Explain your thinking.
2. Choose one of the words you wrote down and create a “Mood Board.” You can do this electronically or with art supplies if you have them. You are looking for images that connect to your word in some way. If you search online, you can import the images you find into a program on your device, and if you are making a Mood Board on a piece of poster paper you can print the images, or look through printed sources like magazines and cut them out and glue them to your board. (Be sure you have permission to cut them out.) Arrange the images on your Mood Board until you really like how they look together.
3. Think of an activity or event that you love to do. It could be a physical activity, or an event you do with friends or family, or even something you do alone or in small groups like gaming or watching videos. Imagine yourself doing the activity or event and think about the range of emotions you might experience over time. As you experience that activity in your mind, your feelings and emotions will not remain the same...they will change through time. Next, let’s create an Emotional Architecture Map. To do this, get a big piece of paper and something to write with, or use a drawing program on your electronic device. Create some graphic images to represent your emotional journey in your imagined event or experience, starting from the left of your page and ending on the right of your page. It does not have to look like Eric’s page he created for *Deep Field* but can

represent your own creative ideas and shapes.

4. Consider sharing your emotional images with someone else and see if they can get a feel for what you have created. Explain to them what your inspiration was to create the images, and explain what activity or experience is associated with the architectural forms you chose. Try to be “free from a sense of judgment” if possible.

Reflection and Insights

Did you find this exercise of the Mood Board to be easy or hard for you? Was it fun or was it challenging? Explain your answers.

Did you find this exercise of the Emotional Architecture Map to be easy or hard for you? Was it fun or was it challenging? Explain your answers.

Would you repeat this process on another topic or idea? Explain your thinking and your experience.

Has the process of being creative and exploring emotions and images inspired you to pursue anything in your life further, such as finding out more about space, or exploring some new experience? Describe your ideas or explain your final thoughts about the process and what you may have learned by doing it.

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

CHAPTERS 3 – 5: THE GOLDEN BRICK

A single idea that unifies the entire work

Teacher's Guide

NOTE: The lessons for Chapters 3, 4, 5 have been combined as they are connected through the exploration of the concept of the Golden Brick. Teachers and students are encouraged to explore these lessons as a unit, segmented as necessary for time constraints.

Synopsis

Chapter 3: The Golden Brick

In Chapter 3, Eric discusses his concept of the Golden Brick – a single idea that unifies the entire work. The Golden Brick could be an idea, a chord or a few notes that express the “big idea” that shapes the work. He demonstrates this through two pieces, *Lux Aurumque* (Light and Gold) for choir and *Deep Field*, for orchestra (or wind band), choir and smartphones.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Lux Aurumque*: <https://youtu.be/e6HVCqQStRE>
- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>

Chapter 4: Building with the Golden Brick: Themes

In Chapter 4, Eric continues his discussion of the themes generated by the Golden Brick, specifically. He demonstrates this through three of his works: *Cloudburst*, *Deep Field*, and *Sleep*, in which he shows how the pitches which make up the Golden Brick chords resonate with melody and “sing with possibility.” The shimmering tones of the Golden Brick theme create the melodic and harmonic elements that allow the full work to emerge clearly in unity and inevitability.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Cloudburst*: <https://youtu.be/BQOMypd3JmM>
- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>
- *Sleep*: <https://youtu.be/Yw5gupbe9E0>

Chapter 5: Building with the Golden Brick: Gestures

Eric demonstrates further how the Golden Brick informs and shapes the work, first in *Equus*, where the number “5” guides the composer in various ways. In *The Sacred Veil*, the Golden Brick is the tone “middle C,” representing the “veil,” or ribbon of energy dividing life and death. The two main themes derive from that pitch, with “Julie’s theme” rising up from middle C and the “gravity theme” pulling back. In *Deep Field*, the Golden Brick chord is used to demonstrate the “in focus/out of focus” quality of the music. Through the use of these gestures, the composer is able to reduce some of the randomness of decision making, since composition is based on the Golden Brick. Audiences may sense the structure of the work, even if they are not aware of the musical specifics.

These videos will help you guide students in gaining insight into Eric’s approach for creating musical themes and gestures by exploring Golden Bricks. They will explore even more ideas that may help them listen to all music more insightfully.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Equus*: <https://youtu.be/EiiJxpJuCsA>
- *The Sacred Veil*: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_k-FSrcD6Jf5jSBlzn8t3mQwB90V7ANIM

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- **Louis Kahn** (1901–1974) said “Even a brick wants to be something. It aspires. Even a common, ordinary brick... wants to be something more than it is.” Kahn was an American architect, based in Philadelphia. After working in various capacities for several firms in Philadelphia, he founded his own atelier in 1935. While continuing his private practice, he served as a design critic and professor of architecture at Yale School of Architecture from 1947 to 1957. From 1957 until his death, he was a professor of architecture at the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania.
- **The Golden Brick** (A chord or a couple of chords or a few notes plus a big idea all combined together to form the central idea for an entire piece.)
- **“A Musical Hook”** (A musical idea, often a short riff, passage, or phrase, that is used in popular music to make a song appealing and to “catch the ear of the listener.” The term generally applies to popular music, especially rock, R&B, hip hop, dance, and pop. In these genres, the hook is often found in, or consists of, the chorus. A hook can be either melodic or rhythmic, and often incorporates the main motif for a piece of music.)
- **Lux Aurumque** (“Light and Gold,” is a 4-minute work for mixed choir a cappella composed in 2000. The work was featured in Whitacre’s 2009 Virtual Choir project.)
Listen: <https://youtu.be/e6HVCqQStRE>
- **Cloudburst** (A musical work by Eric composed between 1991 and 1995 for eight-part choir, with piano and percussion accompaniment.)
Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQOMypd3JmM>
- **Sleep** (A musical work by Eric that premiered in 2000 for a cappella chorus with lyrics by poet Charles Anthony Silvestri.)
Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yw5gupbe9E0>
- **Deep Field** (A musical work composed by Eric in 2015 for orchestra, choir, and smartphones.)
Listen: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>
- **Equus** (A musical work composed by Eric for choir, also adapted for concert band.)
Listen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp3ArLgR6WQ>
- **The Sacred Veil** (A 12-movement work composed by Eric in 2018 with texts from poet/lyricist Charles Anthony Silvestri telling a story of courtship, love, loss and the search for solace.)
Listen: <http://smarturl.it/TheSacredVeil>
- **The Hubble Space Telescope** (A space telescope launched into low Earth orbit in 1990 and remains in operation.)
- **Musical Motive** (A short musical phrase, a salient recurring figure, musical fragment, or succession of notes that has some special importance in or is characteristic of a composition.)

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

After viewing, the questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Discovering the Golden Brick

See specific instructions in the Student Guide. This activity will encourage students to use all their senses to observe the world around them and later, to turn those observations into a visual representation of those sights, sounds, and feels.

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this segment, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTERS 3 – 5: THE GOLDEN BRICK

A single idea that unifies the entire work

Student Guide



Introduction

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 will help you gain some insight into Eric’s approach for creating musical themes and gestures by exploring Golden Bricks. You will explore even more ideas that may help you listen to all music more insightfully. In Chapter 3, Eric discusses his concept of the Golden Brick – a single idea that unifies the entire work. The Golden Brick could be a chord or a few notes that express the “big idea” that shapes the work. He demonstrates this through two works, *Lux Aurumque* (Light and Gold) for mixed choir a cappella and *Deep Field*, for orchestra (or wind band), choir and smartphones. Works referenced in this video:

- *Lux Aurumque*: <https://youtu.be/e6HVCqQStRE>
- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>

In Chapter 4, Eric continues his discussion of the themes generated by the Golden Brick, specifically. He demonstrates this through three of his works: *Cloudburst*, *Deep Field*, and *Sleep*, in which he shows how the pitches which make up the Golden

Brick chords resonate with melody and “sing with possibility.” The shimmering tones of the Golden Brick theme create the melodic and harmonic elements that allow the full work to emerge clearly in unity and inevitability. Works referenced in this video:

- *Cloudburst*: <https://youtu.be/BQOMypd3JmM>
- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>
- *Sleep*: <https://youtu.be/Yw5gupbe9E0>

In Chapter 5, Eric demonstrates further how the Golden Brick informs and shapes the work, first in *Equus*, where the number “5” guides the composer in various ways. In *The Sacred Veil*, the Golden Brick is the tone “middle C,” representing the “veil,” or ribbon of energy dividing life and death. In *Deep Field*, the Golden Brick chord is used to demonstrate the “in focus/out of focus” quality of the music. Through these gestures, the composer reduces some of the seeming randomness of decision making, since composition is based on the Golden Brick. And, audiences may sense the structure of the work, even if they are not aware of the musical specifics. Works referenced in this video:

- *Equus*: <https://youtu.be/EiiJxpJuCsA>
- *The Sacred Veil*: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_k-FSrcD6Jf5jSBlizn8t3mQwB90V7ANIM

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Louis Kahn
The Golden Brick
A Musical Hook
Lux Aurumque
Cloudburst
Sleep
Deep Field
Equus

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

Can images be adequately expressed in other ways such as through sound, words, or feelings? Why, or why not? Explain your thinking.

A Golden Brick represents a set of musical ideas that can unify a composition. What are some other unifying ideas, techniques, or principles found in visual art, theater, and dance?

When architect Louis Kahn said “Even a brick wants to be something. It aspires. Even a common, ordinary brick... wants to be something more than it is”, what do you think he was trying to say? What does that quote mean to you?

Discover the Golden Brick

1. Listen to Whitacre’s *Lux Aurumque* and see if you can hear the Golden Brick ideas throughout the composition. Do you feel like it affects your breathing as you listen in the way that Eric described in the video? What else do you think of while you are listening? Explain.

Listen: <https://youtu.be/e6HVCqQStRE>

2. Listen a second time to *Lux Aurumque* and allow yourself to breathe to the phrase structure of the piece...in and out...as you listen. Do you notice a difference in how you feel from the start to the finish when you breathe consciously with the music? Explain your thoughts.

3. Listen to Whitacre’s *Cloudburst* and see if you can hear his Golden Brick ideas throughout the composition. Do you get the sense of an approaching rainstorm as you listen? Describe your thoughts in the climatic (loud) sections toward the end of the piece. What else do you think of while you are listening?

Listen: <https://youtu.be/BQOMypd3JmM>

4. When people describe popular music, they sometimes use the term “musical hook.” A “hook” is a musical idea, often a short riff, passage, or phrase, that is used in popular music to make a song appealing and to “catch the ear of the listener.” Find a song or piece of music that you already know and enjoy and see if you can describe the unifying elements or “hooks” in the song.

Reflection and Insights

Did you find it easy to hear musical hooks and Golden Bricks in music? Why or why not, in your opinion? Describe your thinking. What might you do to hear them better?

When you think about music, movies, and even sporting events would you say that there are many unifying elements present in each? Describe some of these repeating or unifying elements? Why are these unifying elements important in your opinion?

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

CHAPTER 6: THE PRIMER

Teaching your audience the rules of your world

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In this chapter, Eric presents ideas and concepts for beginning a piece and explains that he usually does not write a work's opening section until toward the end of the process. In this way he can establish the Golden Brick themes and gestures in depth through the full work. By composing the beginning last, he is able to create a coherent opening to introduce those elements to the listener.

Two contrasting works are used to demonstrate this concept, *A Boy and a Girl*, at 4.5 minutes, and *Deep Field*, at more than 20 minutes. This will allow the students to discover how the difference in scale shapes the openings of both works.

This video will help you gain some insight into Eric's approach for creating the beginning of a song or musical composition. You will explore even more ideas that may help you listen to all music more insightfully, including the concept of "musical form."

Works referenced in this video:

- *A Boy and a Girl*: https://youtu.be/j_AMI0vRqF8
- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- *A Boy and a Girl* (A 4.5 minute musical work composed by Eric in 2002 for a cappella choir.)
- *Deep Field* (A 23-minute musical work composed by Eric in 2015 for orchestra, choir, and smartphones.)
- Patterns of three to establish an idea.
- Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951 An Austrian-born composer, music theorist, teacher, writer, and painter. He is widely considered one of the most influential composers of the 20th century.)
- A "Phrase" in music as described by Arnold Schönberg: Any group of notes that can be sung in one breath.
- Musical Form (A term describing how a musical song or composition is structured into distinct sections such as "introduction, verse, bridge, chorus" etc.)
- Listening Map (A graphic representation of musical events in a piece that help the listener follow along and perceive musical elements in the song or composition.)

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

The questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Exploring the form of a work

Students will be encouraged to explore the form of a work to see how the Golden Brick themes and elements are introduced

and carried through to the conclusion. Based on their level, students will listen, improvise and compose, using the tools explored in this chapter.

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this segment, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTER 6: THE PRIMER

Teaching your audience the rules of your world

Student Guide



Introduction

This video will help you gain some insight into Eric's approach for creating the beginning of a song or musical composition. You will explore even more ideas that may help you listen to all music more insightfully, including the concept of "musical form."

In this chapter, Eric presents ideas and concepts for beginning a piece and explains that he usually does not write a work's opening section until toward the end of the process. In this way he can establish the Golden Brick themes and gestures in depth through the full work. By composing the beginning last he is able to create a coherent opening to introduce those elements to the listener.

Two contrasting works are used to demonstrate this concept, *A Boy and a Girl*, at 4.5 minutes, and *Deep Field*, at more than 20 minutes. This will allow the students to discover how the difference in scale shapes the openings of both works.

Works referenced in this video:

- *A Boy and a Girl* – https://youtu.be/j_AMl0vRqF8
- *Deep Field* – <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

A Boy and a Girl
Deep Field
 Patterns of three
 Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951)
 A “Phrase” in music as described by Arnold Schönberg
 Musical Form
 Listening Map

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

When you are watching a new video, how important is it for you that the video creates interest and keeps you watching in the first few moments? Are you a person that will get bored and turn it off almost immediately, or will you keep watching to see if it gets better? Why is this important?

It has been said that “you never get a second chance to make a first impression.” What do you think this means? Do you think this is true, and do you pay special attention when you are meeting a new person for the first time?

Have you ever listened to music with the intention of picking out the sections of the musical form? Is the idea of “form” a new concept for you?

Creating an opening

1. Listen to a song you know well. Can you hear how the song is divided up into sections such as a verse and a chorus? This is the “form” of the song. Can you hear when these sections repeat or when they are heard for the first time in the song? Make a “listening map” representing the sections by creating symbols or images on a piece of paper. Be creative and select images

you think connect to the song in some way.

2. Have someone listen to the same song as they look at your listening map of the musical form. Can they follow your listening map? Do they agree with your depiction of the musical form? Change your map if you discover mistakes, or if you think it would be improved some other way.

3. Using the same song, write a spoken introduction for the song that could be used to prepare the listener for what they will hear. Let the introduction be a “preview” that helps the listener hear the song better on a first hearing.

Reflection and Insights

Did you find it easy to hear musical form in music? Why, or why not, in your opinion? Describe your thinking. What might you do to hear form better?

What makes a song interesting? How does musical form affect this opinion? Does the first section of a new song need to hold your attention, or will you listen to the whole song before you decide if you like it?

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

CHAPTER 7: PAINTING WITH SOUND

Illuminating poetry with music

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In this video, Eric discusses the art of setting poetry to music, a concept which he describes as “finding the music that already exists within the poetry.” He describes three word-painting techniques which he uses in his music – Literal, Emotional, and Conceptual.

This video will help you guide students as they gain insight into Eric’s approach for setting text in a musical composition. They will explore ideas that will help them understand how musical sound can express aspects of a text. They will try to imagine music as they look at art (Curiosity) and think about music (Creator). The Composer Edition explores “finding the music that is already hidden beneath the words themselves,” as students create a musical composition inspired from a poem.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Go, Lovely Rose*: https://youtu.be/X7Uv9Ke0_vk
- *When David Heard*: <https://youtu.be/AwFACXDoOiY>
- *Water Night*: <https://youtu.be/1DQQmtNuXUU>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- Word Painting (The musical technique of composing music that reflects the literal meaning of a song’s lyrics or story elements in programmatic music.)
- Conceptual Sound Painting (Realizing, through sound, a concept in the text as opposed to the literal interpretation of the text.)
- *Go, Lovely Rose* (The third piece composed by Eric from *Three Flower Songs* on a poem by Edmund Waller.)
- Emotional Sound Painting (A word or a phrase in which you try to find the right combination of notes to express the emotional subtext beneath.)
- *When David Heard* (A piece composed by Eric that is 15 minutes in duration. It was composed in 1999 and was commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for the Arts for the Brigham Young Singers.)
- Literal Sound Painting (Representing, in sound, literal aspects of the imagery of the poetry.)
- *Water Night* (One of Eric’s earliest works, written in 1995 and commissioned by the Dale Warland Singers. It is written for SATB choir a cappella with three, four and five-part divisi in vocal sections. The text is from Octavio Paz’s poem *Agua Nocturna*, adapted by Whitacre and translated by Muriel Rukeyser.)

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

The questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Illuminating poetry with music

Students will be encouraged to explore the concepts of word painting in music through listening, reading poetry and viewing works of art. Based on their level, students will listen, improvise and compose, using the insights gained in this video and through their discussions with fellow students.

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this lesson, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTER 7: PAINTING WITH SOUND

Student Guide



Introduction

This video will help you gain insight into Eric’s approach for setting text in a musical composition. You will explore ideas that will help you understand how musical sound can express aspects of a text. You will try to imagine music as you look at art and think about music.

In this video, Eric discusses the art of setting poetry to music, a concept which he describes as “finding the music that already exists within the poetry.” He describes three word-painting techniques which he uses in his music – Literal, Emotional and Conceptual.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Go, Lovely Rose*: https://youtu.be/X7Uv9Ke0_vk
- *When David Heard*: <https://youtu.be/AwFACXDoOiY>
- *Water Night*: <https://youtu.be/1DQQmtNuXUU>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Word Painting
Conceptual Sound Painting
Go, Lovely Rose
Emotional Sound Painting
When David Heard
Literal Sound Painting
Water Night

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

Have you ever thought about how various words might “sound” if realized in music? How might composers do this?

“Word Painting” in music refers to making the text come alive in sound. Do you think painters can create words through their images? Find a piece of art in your physical environment and look at it for a while. What words come to your mind?

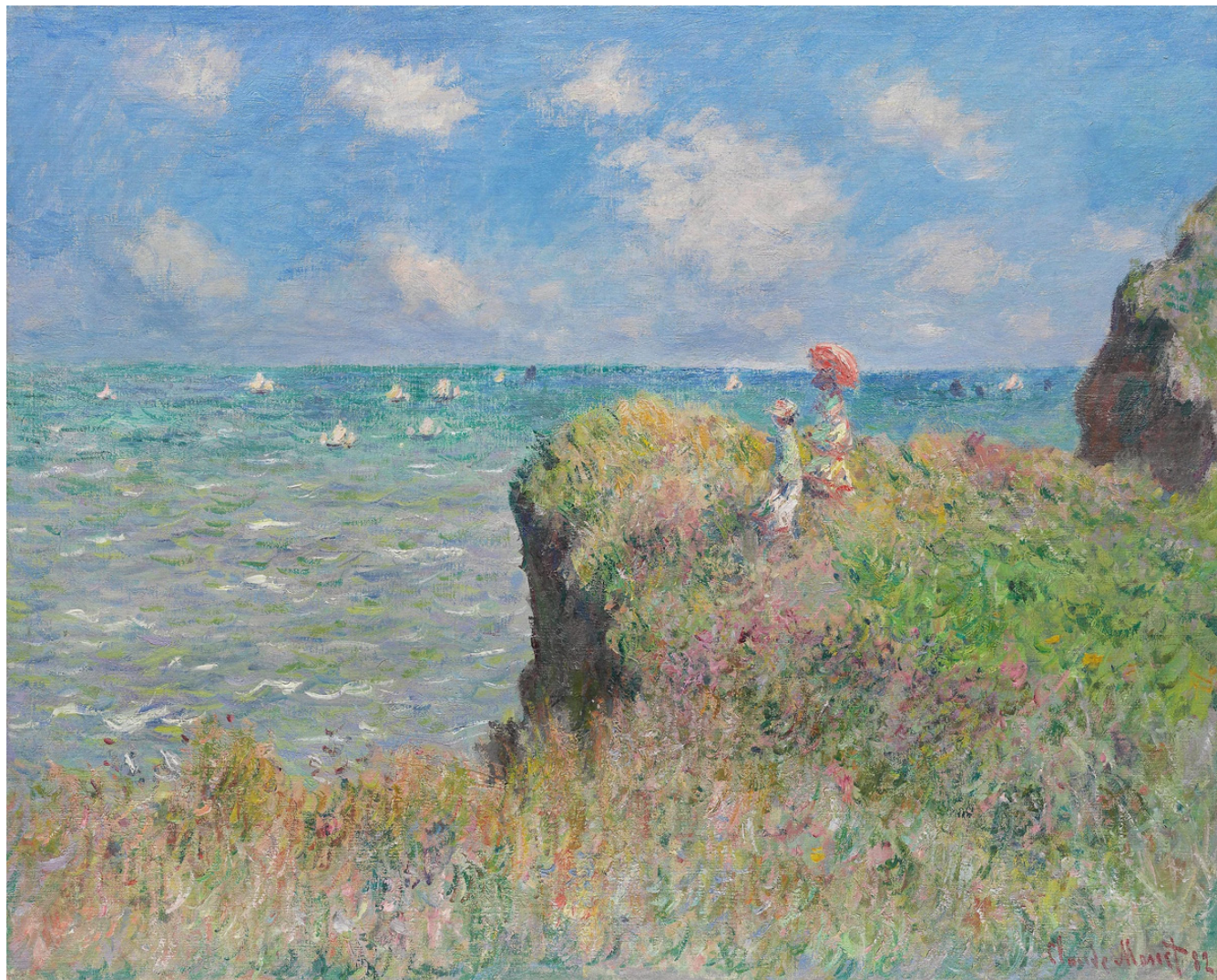
Do you think music sounds like emotions feel? Explain your thoughts whether you agree or disagree.

Illuminating poetry with music

1. Watch this video about word painting in popular music on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/Lm9PxXsK3gY>

Did you know about word painting before you saw this video on YouTube, or the video by Eric Whitacre? Explain your thoughts. Why do you think word painting is an important part of the experience of music?

2. Look at these two paintings:



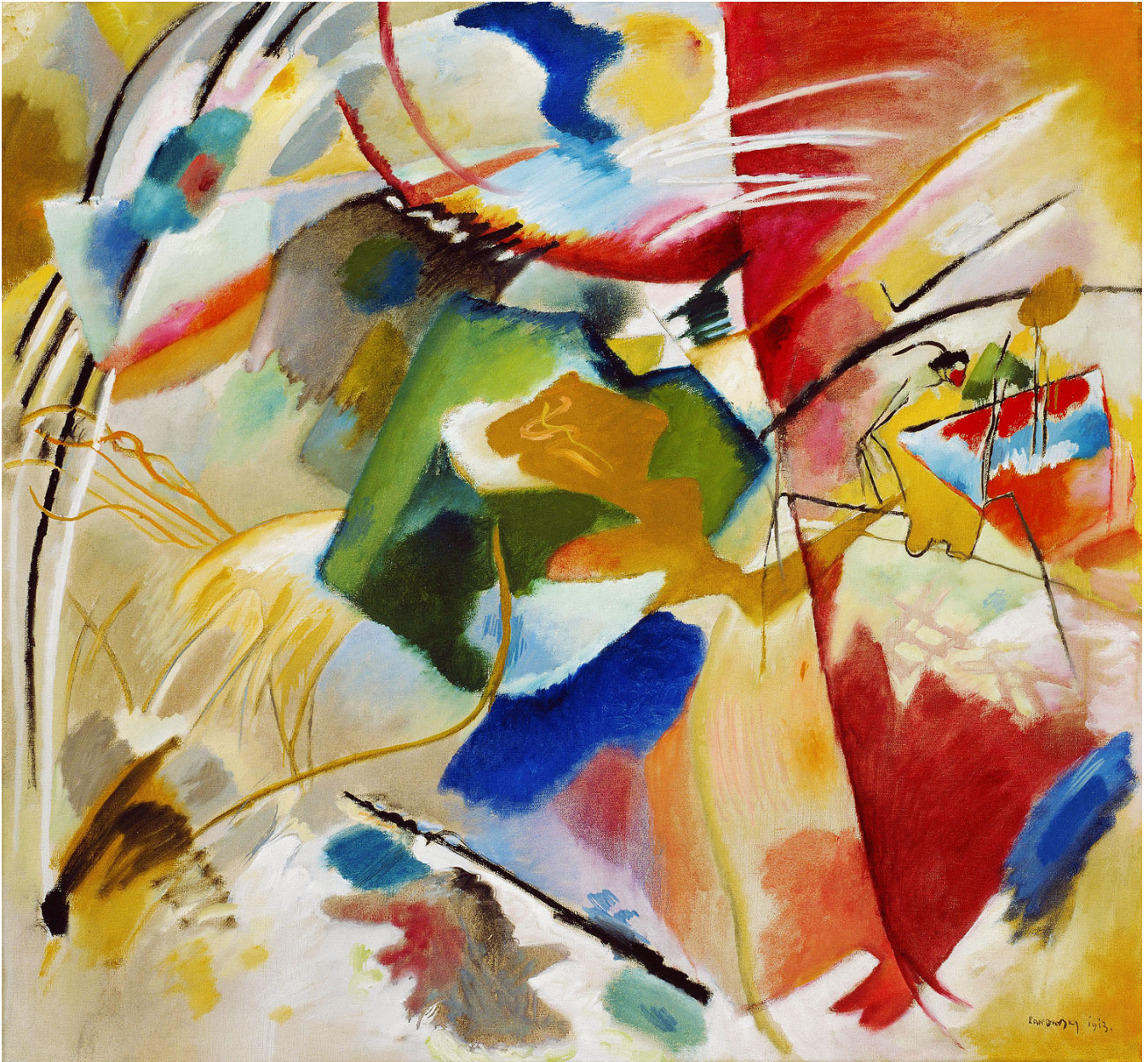
Cliff Walk at Pourville

Date: 1882

Artist: Claude Monet

French, 1840-1926

Art Institute of Chicago



Painting with Green Center

Date: 1913

Artist: Vasily Kandinsky

French, born Russia, 1866–1944

Art Institute of Chicago

If these paintings could be realized in musical sound, what kinds of sounds might they make? Try to imagine each one, and then describe what you hear. Focus on what each painting sounds like, and what makes them different and what makes them similar.

3. Do you know a song that uses word painting in the music? What is the song, and how does it paint the text through music? Describe what you hear.

Reflection and Insights

Did you find it easy to hear and describe word painting in music? Why, or why not? Describe your thinking. What might you do to hear word painting better?

Do you think music can have “word painting” without a text to draw from? To state it a different way, do you think music can create images in your mind even when there are no words being sung? Why, or why not?

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

CHAPTER 8: VOICING

Building tuning and shimmering at the structural level

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In this chapter, Eric demonstrates the effect of voicing the chords used in the piece and the ways a composer can create voice leading that allows non-professional singers to easily sing complex clusters. He discusses how the overtone series, the placement of the text and choice of the vowel strengthens intonation.

This lesson will help you guide students in gaining some insight into Eric's approach for writing voice parts in a musical composition. In the Curiosity edition, they will explore ideas to understand how voices can create musical clusters with simple formulas, and they will learn to listen for overtones. In the Creator edition, they will explore ideas to understand how voices can sound better when voiced in relation to the overtone series, and they will create some musical clusters. In the Composer edition, they will also create some complex musical clusters with simple voice leading.

Works referenced in this chapter:

- *Go, Lovely Rose*: https://youtu.be/X7Uv9Ke0_vk
- *Sainte-Chapelle*: https://youtu.be/vA_dBlc33JE

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- The Fundamental Frequency (The lowest partial present in a complex waveform.)
- The overtone series (A sequence of frequencies, musical tones, or pure tones in which each frequency is an integer multiple of a fundamental frequency.)
- Vowels and overtone clusters (Notes that are close together and using similar vowel sounds)
- *Sainte-Chapelle* (A composition by Eric for mixed choir written in 2013 that is about eight minutes in duration and was commissioned by The Tallis Scholars to commemorate their 40th anniversary.)

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

The questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Building tuning and shimmering at the structural level

Students will be encouraged to explore the concept of the overtone series in music and will explore techniques of developing chord clusters based on the overtone series and other scales.

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this lesson, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTER 8: VOICING

Building tuning and shimmering at the structural level

Student Guide



Introduction

This video will help you gain some insight into Eric's approach for writing voice parts in a musical composition. You will explore ideas that will help you understand how voices can create musical clusters with simple formulas, and you will learn to listen for overtones.

In Chapter 8, Eric demonstrates the effect of voicing the chords used in the piece and the ways a composer can create voice leading that allows non-professional singers to easily sing complex clusters. He discusses how the overtone series, the placement of the text and choice of the vowel strengthens intonation.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Go, Lovely Rose*: https://youtu.be/X7Uv9Ke0_vk
- *Sainte-Chapelle*: https://youtu.be/vA_dBlc33JE

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Fundamental Frequency
Overtone series
Vowels and overtone clusters
Sainte-Chapelle

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

Think about how buildings are designed. Many buildings are bigger on the bottom and smaller on the top. Why do you think this is? How do you think this can be applied to music?

The overtone series in music has bigger spaces between notes on the bottom (lower frequencies) and smaller spaces between notes the top (higher frequencies). Have you ever heard of the overtone series before? What do you know about it? How is this like a tall building and why do you think the overtone series can make music sound more stable and interesting?

Building tuning and shimmering at the structural level

1. Watch this video about the overtone series: <https://youtu.be/OATjHiOuc70>.

Did you know about the overtone series before you saw this video, or the video by Eric Whitacre? Why is this naturally occurring phenomenon an important part of the experience of music?

2. If you have access to an acoustic piano (not an electronic piano) then try this experiment. Play and hold down one of the piano keys toward the bottom (left) of the keyboard. Listen to the sound of the string as it vibrates. Listen for and explore the sound it creates. Next, hold down the sustain pedal (the pedal to the right on most pianos) and then strike the same key again and hold it down as you did before. Do you hear a slightly different sound? If so, you will probably be hearing other higher strings on the piano vibrating because of the low one. Can you pick out the notes of the strings that you hear? It is because of the overtone series that these other higher strings tend to vibrate with the lower one. Try playing different notes using the same approach. Do you hear similar patterns of sounds? Describe your experience.

3. Do a curiosity experiment with vowels and overtone clusters: Sing the song *Happy Birthday to You* with three other people who are curious and can sing the song pretty close to in tune. Have each person start the song together in unison but with different people stopping on different words and holding them to the end of the song. For example:

- PERSON 1 sings “Happy Birthday.....” and holds the note for “day” until the end of the song.

- PERSON 2 sings “Happy Birthday to you” and holds the note for “you” until the end of the song.
- PERSON 3 sings “Happy Birthday to you, happy birth” and holds the note for “birth” until the end of the song.
- PERSON 4 sings “Happy Birthday to you, happy birthday to” and holds the note for “to” until the end of the song.

Listen for the cluster of notes you create when you do this experiment. On this song we are singing the cluster with three different vowel sounds: oo (to, you), ur (birth) and ay (day). Listen how it sounds to have these three vowels sung together. For fun, try having every voice end on the same word sound (vowel) when you hold the notes. The easiest way to do this is to do the experiment as outlined above, and then have everyone change to a certain word on their note together at the very end. It’s likely that you will need to take a quick breath and come back in on your note. Try these words and see what the cluster sounds like on each of these words: ah (mom), eh (set), ee (see), oh (home), oo (soon).

For more fun try stopping on different words or singing another song and doing the same experiment. What kinds of cool clusters can you create? If you don’t prefer to sing, try creating some clusters on the piano or on some other instrument or software program that can create sustained pitches.

Reflection and Insights

Did you find it easy to hear and describe overtones in music? Why, or why not? Describe your thinking. What could you do to hear overtones better?

Eric says he composes and voices his music with bigger intervals on the bottom, just like the overtone series. Why do you think this makes his music sound more stable, like a tall building with a big foundation?

Did you enjoy creating vowel clusters? Explain your experience and your relative success with the activity.

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

CHAPTER 9: BACKGROUND COUNTERPOINT

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In this video, Eric describes how the background textures, melody and harmony can work together to create expectation for the listener. The composer can do this deliberately or intuitively, creating a sense of structure for the audience. Eric uses an example from *Let It Go* (from Disney's *Frozen*), showing how the rising melody functions like a ladder in leading the listener to the climax of the refrain. Eric further uses *A Boy and a Girl* to demonstrate how dissonance, unison, return of a previous chord structure and resolution can bring the piece to a satisfying completion.

This video will help you guide students in gaining insight into resolution in a musical melody. Students will explore concepts that will help them understand how dissonance in music works, and how melodies can resolve to sound more stable and complete. In the Composer Edition, they will also compose a melody using Eric's concept of Background Counterpoint.

Works referenced in this video:

- *A Boy and a Girl*: https://youtu.be/j_AMl0vRqF8

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- Background Counterpoint (Points or notes of a melody or composition that create interest by setting up an expectation in the ear of the listener which eventually is resolved in the music.)
- Dissonance (The term used to describe musical sounds that build tension.)

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

The questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Using structure to build long ideas

Students will be encouraged to explore the concept of consonance, dissonance and resolution and how expectation can be built into a work help the listener anticipate and recognize the conclusion.

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this lesson, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTER 9: BACKGROUND COUNTERPOINT

Using structure to build long ideas

Student Guide



Introduction

This video will help you gain insight into resolution in a musical melody. You will explore ideas that will help you understand how dissonance in music works, and how melodies can resolve to sound more stable and complete.

In Chapter 9, Eric describes how the background textures, melody and harmony can work together to create expectation for the listener. The composer can do this deliberately or intuitively, creating a sense of structure for the audience. Eric uses an example from *Let It Go* (Disney's *Frozen*), showing how the rising melody functions like a ladder in leading the listener to the climax of the refrain. Eric further uses *A Boy and a Girl* to demonstrate how dissonance, unison, return of a previous chord structure and resolution can bring the piece to a satisfying completion.

Works referenced in this video:

- *A Boy and a Girl*: https://youtu.be/j_AMI0vRqF8

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Background Counterpoint
Dissonance

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

Why do melodies sound “finished” when they are sung all the way through, but unfinished if you only hear part of it? What is happening musically?

What is dissonance in music? How is it created? How is it resolved?

Using structure to build long ideas

1. Watch a video about dissonant and consonant note pairs on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/DSN9q7PKNN0>

Find a piano and play some of these intervals. Experiment with notes close together and also notes that are far apart. Be curious about all the different combinations of notes you can play and notice if you like how some sound compared to others. Try playing some dissonant note pairs followed by some consonant note pairs. Describe what you hear.

2. Sing the song *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* once all the way through to the end.

Row, row, row your boat gen - tly down the stream

mer - ri - ly mer - ri - ly mer - ri - ly mer - ri - ly life is but a dream

Notice how the song feels “finished” at the end because it returns to the first note of the melody. Try singing it again and ending on the following words: “stream” and then sing again and end on “life.” Do you feel how the music does not feel resolved when you end on these words? The Background Counterpoint leads you to expect the melody to return to the first note of the song, and unless you do it feels unresolved. Explain what you noticed in this experiment.

3. Pick another song you know and do the same experiment or play a song from a recording but stop it part of the way through. Do you feel a need to keep playing or singing? Why or why not?

Reflection and Insights

Some people really like the sound of dissonant note pairs and dissonance in music while some other people really prefer consonance in music. Do you have a preference? Explain your thinking.

Eric says his music uses background counterpoint to make the listener expect something to happen as he makes them wait for the resolution later in the music. How is this like a “knock-knock” joke that is missing the last line? Why is the last line important?

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

CHAPTER 10: FINDING YOUR VOICE

Your 'sound' as a reflection of your true self

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In this video, Eric discusses the process of “finding your voice” as a composer, or “writing who you are.” He demonstrates this through several of his works in which he effectively quotes himself when similar themes or images emerge. He suggests that composers look to their inner world, through meditation, as well as by listening to a great deal of music, finding voices that speak to them, that become their heroes. In these ways, young composers can discover their own emotional truth, and from that, their personal style will grow organically. This video will help you guide students in gaining insight into what it means to “find your voice.” They will explore ideas that will help them learn more about their own unique style.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Go, Lovely Rose*: https://youtu.be/X7Uv9Ke0_vk
- *Cloudburst*: <https://youtu.be/BQOMypd3JmM>
- *Water Night*: <https://youtu.be/1DQQmtNuXUU>
- *A Boy and a Girl*: https://youtu.be/j_AMI0vRqF8
- *i carry your heart*: <https://youtu.be/lm6lFtyPN5E>
- ‘Home’ from *The Sacred Veil*: <https://youtu.be/IT9dZEWKGWY>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- Style (your musical lexicon; building blocks of sound that define you)
- Your Unique Sound World (your inner musical world)
- “A sonic symbol to describe your inner world” (a specific chord or motive that defines you and your style)
- “Composers are collectors”
- Don’t try to impress your audience: They want truth and authenticity.

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

The questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Using structure to build long ideas

Students will be encouraged to explore the concept of discovering a personal style through journaling, discussion, improvisation (Creator) and composition (Composer).

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this lesson, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTER 10: FINDING YOUR VOICE

Your 'sound' as a reflection of your true self

Student Guide



Introduction

This video will help you gain insight into what it means to “find your voice.” You will explore ideas that will help you know more about your unique style.

In this video, Eric discusses the process of “finding your voice” as a composer, or how to “write who you are.” He demonstrates this through several of his works in which he effectively quotes himself when similar themes or images emerge. He suggests that composers look to their inner world, through meditation, as well as by listening to a great deal of music, finding voices that speak to them, that become their heroes. In these ways, young composers can discover their own emotional truth, and from that, their personal style will grow organically.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Go, Lovely Rose*: https://youtu.be/X7Uv9Ke0_vk
- *Cloudburst*: <https://youtu.be/BQOMypd3JmM>
- *Water Night*: <https://youtu.be/1DQQmtNuXUU>
- *A Boy and a Girl*: https://youtu.be/j_AMI0vRqF8

- *i carry your heart*: <https://youtu.be/lm6lFtyPN5E>
- 'Home' from *The Sacred Veil*: <https://youtu.be/IT9dZEWKGWY>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Style

Your Unique Sound World

"A sonic symbol to describe your inner world"

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

What are some things that you would describe as "uniquely you?"

What do you think "style" is and how would you describe your own personal "style?"

What kinds of music do you love to listen to, and what does this say about your personal musical style?

Your "sound" as a reflection of your true self

1. Except for identical twins, no two people are exactly alike; even identical twins have subtle differences in their personal preferences, likes and dislikes, and how they may dress, think, or express themselves. Your unique voice can be expressed in so many ways. Take some time to describe yourself in relation to the following ideas by completing the following sentences (use one or many words for each):

- When I speak, I want people to hear...
- I dress the way I do because I want people to see...
- When someone first meets me, the word(s) they would use to describe me would probably be...
- When someone gets to know me, the word(s) they would use to describe me would probably be...

2. How you answer these questions will give you a little insight into your unique style. Share your answers with someone who knows you well and see if they have any insights for you from an outside perspective. There are no right and wrong answers, only insights into your uniqueness.
3. The sentences you completed (above) were intended to give you insights into your unique preferences and your unique style. Write several new sentences that are similar, but different, to the sentences you completed above. Have the new statements express even more about you as a unique individual.
4. Describe your personal style in a paragraph. How do the things you like and dislike express who YOU are through your choices of clothes, music, food, tastes, or other factors? Discuss your thoughts.
5. What is your favorite kind (genre) of music? Who are your favorite musical artists? Describe how you think you came to like these artists better than other. Describe why the style of the music matches your own personal musical style and tastes. In other words, explain why you like the music you listen to more than other music that you don't choose to listen to.
6. Eric describes the concept of "A sonic symbol to describe your inner world." If you had to choose one short sound that would be your unique style marker, what would that sound be? Would it be a sound that naturally is found in your daily life, like a car horn or a computer beep, or would it be a musical sound of some kind? Spend a day or two listening to ALL the sounds you hear around you as you move through your day. Go online and find some musical sounds or other kinds of sounds. If you hear one that you like – that you think could be a kind of "sonic symbol" for you, remember it or record it. Share it with friends and describe why you feel it expresses your inner world in some way.

Reflection and Insights

Do you try to achieve an unusual style, or do you like to blend into the style fabric of the people around you? Explain your thoughts.

Eric says: "Be a sponge: Listen to everything." How much do you do this? Are you open to new ideas and music, or are you set in your preferences and likes/dislikes of music? Explain.

Your style is like a favorite color or a favorite food. Only you know what you like and prefer. Would you say you are developing your unique style, or do you think that you already have a style and are learning better how to express it? Explain.

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

CHAPTER 11: WALKTHROUGH – THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

Putting it together

Teacher's Guide

Synopsis

In Chapter 11, Eric discusses a work in process, his chamber opera *The Gift of the Magi*, based on a short story by the American writer, O. Henry, published in 1905. He reviews several aspects of composition discussed in this masterclass: 1) Emotional Architecture; 2) the “Golden Brick”; 3) Lyrics and 4) Voice, referencing his inner world of sound, demonstrating with a duet from the opera. He discusses the “hook” – a term more often used in pop music – and demonstrates how the hook illuminates the music and creates the Emotional Architecture of the work. Ultimately, Eric says, he writes “what I want to listen to,” and by doing that, he displays his authentic voice, and invites the audience to join that emotional journey.

This video will help you guide students in gaining insight into hearing how “form” is constructed. They will explore ideas that will help them understand how pop songs and other short forms are put together. In the Creator and Composer editions, they will create a visual “form” map using found objects and create a short composition of their own.

Works referenced in this video:

- *The Gift of the Magi*: no recording available yet
- *little tree*: <https://youtu.be/hokPwKzu0YI>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

- Form (In music, form refers to the structure of a musical composition or performance.)
- Pop song structure (Intro, Verse 1, Hook 1 (Chorus), Verse 2, Hook 2, Bridge, Double Hook, Outro)
- Binary Form (Two sections that may repeat)
- Ternary Form (Three different sections that may repeat)
- Write the words, then the music

Essential Questions for Discussion, Discovery and Insight

The questions in the Student Guide may be used for individual journaling or group/collaborative discussion. Students should be encouraged to write quickly without fear of criticism or judgment.

Application – Putting it together

Students will be encouraged to explore the structure of form in a pop song and to experience it through listening/analysis (Curiosity), demonstration (Creator) and composition (Composer).

Reflection and Insights

To conclude this segment, use the questions and prompts in the Student Guide and have students journal or discuss the application activity, writing their responses or discussing in large/small groups.

CHAPTER 11: WALKTHROUGH – THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

Putting it together

Student Guide



Introduction

This video will help you gain insight into hearing how “form” is constructed as in Eric’s opera *The Gift of the Magi*. You will explore ideas that will help you understand how pop songs and other short forms are put together.

In Chapter 11, Eric discusses a work in process, his chamber opera *The Gift of the Magi*, based on a short story by the American writer, O. Henry, published in 1905. He reviews several aspects of composition discussed in this masterclass: 1) Emotional architecture; 2) the Golden Brick; 3) Lyrics and 4) Voice, referencing his inner world of sound, demonstrating with a duet from the opera. He discusses the “hook” – a term more often used in pop music – and demonstrates how the hook illuminates the music and creates the Emotional Architecture of the work. Ultimately, Eric says, he writes “what I want to listen to,” and by doing that, he displays his authentic voice, and invites the audience to join that emotional journey.

Works referenced in this video:

- *The Gift of the Magi*: no recording available yet

- *little tree*: <https://youtu.be/hokPwKzu0YI>

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Form
Pop song structure

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

How do you listen for “form” in music?

What are the most common musical forms?

Putting it together

1. Watch this video about musical form on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/6kCfycgW9Wc>

Did you know about what “form” in music was before you viewed this video, or the video by Eric Whitacre? Explain your thoughts. Why do you think musical form is an important part of the experience of music?

2. Listen to a song that you know and like that is popular right now. When you listen, can you hear the two major sections of the form called the “verse” and the “chorus”? To figure out which part is the “chorus” listen for a section of the song that repeats exactly, with the same words and the same music. If you hear a part that uses different words to the same music when it repeats, that is probably a “verse.” Try to map your song on paper using the words “verse” and “chorus” as you listen. Many songs will end up looking like this:

VERSE, CHORUS, VERSE, CHORUS, CHORUS

Perhaps you hear a section that is completely different from the sections you identified as verse and chorus. If so, that could be a third section called a “Bridge.” See if you can find a song with this form:

VERSE, CHORUS, VERSE, CHORUS, BRIDGE, CHORUS

If you notice a short section at the very beginning of the song that sets up the verse, that might be an “introduction” or “intro.” A section at the end that concludes the song is called an “outro” or a “coda.” Not all songs have them, but if your song does, make note of it.

3. As practice for your ears and musical perception, listen to the song “1, 2, 3, 4” by the Plain White T’s and see if you can follow the form as outlined below.

Listen: https://youtu.be/m6pW_q1PvH0

0’04”: Intro (pre-chorus material that sounds like the chorus later, but without words)

0’25”: Verse 1

0’50”: Chorus

1’12”: Verse 2

1’39”: Chorus

2’03”: Verse 3 (no words, instrumental but sounds like the melody of the verse)

2’28”: Chorus (guitar stops strumming for first half of the chorus)

2’50”: Outro (Like the Intro, but with some words from the chorus, and “I love you repeated”)

Reflection and Insights

Did you find it easy to hear and describe form in music? Why or why not? Describe your thinking. What could you do to hear form better?

Eric says he is composing his opera *The Gift of the Magi* with the Pop Song Structure: Intro, Verse 1, Hook 1 (Chorus), Verse 2, Hook 2, Bridge, Double Hook, Outro. Why do you think this particular form is so popular with pop artists and listeners?

Your style is like a favorite color or a favorite food. Only you know what you like and prefer. Would you say you are developing your unique style, or do you think that you already have a style and are learning better how to express it? Explain.

When you think of a favorite pop song you know, is your favorite part the “hook” or “chorus?” Does it make sense that the chorus is called the hook, especially if it sticks in your brain later? Why or why not?

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Teacher's Guide

In the concluding videos of *A Beautiful Mess*, Eric reflects on the emotional journey on which we lead our audiences. He speaks about “what” we are communicating: our truest ideologies, illuminating and lifting our performers and listeners through our musical vision.

Eric speaks of beauty in very simple terms: joy, sorrow, love, birth, death, and the natural world and how his music reflects those concepts. He also describes how the craft of composition is a gift, bringing patience, meticulousness, focus, and discipline to the composer. He views composition as a chance for the “big mind” to speak to the “small mind” and in so doing to transform oneself.

Summative Assessment Options

Here are some ideas for you to consider in assessing students’ engagement with *A Beautiful Mess* virtual class. Feel free to develop your own ideas or to involve your students in developing self-assessment activities or projects.

Curiosity

1. Choose one of the shorter works by Eric Whitacre, possibly *A Boy and a Girl* or *Lux Aurumque* and create a personal reflection or interpretation of the work through a visual representation (drawing, diagram or other medium) or essay.

A Boy and a Girl: https://youtu.be/j_AMI0vRqF8

Lux Aurumque: <https://youtu.be/e6HVCqQStRE>

2. A Listening Map is similar to a style sheet that is created after a piece is composed as a guide for the listener. Choose one of Eric’s shorter pieces (as in #1 above) and as a group, develop a visualization of the music, following the lyrics and timeline of the piece. Describe the music in non-technical terms, such as “high sounds, thick texture, loud, soft, etc.” Listen to the piece again and see if you can follow your listening map.

Creator

1. Divide into small groups and develop a Listening Map for one of Eric’s pieces, following the lyrics and timeline of the piece. Use both musical terms, snippets of the lyrics and music and non-technical descriptions – whatever you think will help the listener connect with the music. Present the piece and listening map to the full class and ask them to critique your presentation.

2. Some students might be interested in choreographing and performing one of Eric’s shorter works. Perform for the class and identify how the emotional architecture of the music is represented through movement.

3. Take the “4-Note Challenge” as Eric describes in Chapter 12. Share it with the world on Instagram or TikTok. How did it feel to work on such a deadline? Describe the process.

Composer

1. As an individual project, develop a Listening Map for one of Eric’s pieces, following the lyrics and timeline of the piece. Use both musical terms, snippets of the lyrics and music and non-technical descriptions – whatever you think will help the listener connect with the music. Present the piece and listening map to a friend or the full class and ask them to critique your presentation.

2. If you have ever performed a work by Eric Whitacre and you have access to a video or audio recording of the work, listen to it and mark your score at key points in the emotional architecture. If you're not a performer, find a performance on YouTube. Describe how the ensemble performs the music at these points. What do they do well and how might they do better?
3. Take the "4-Note Challenge" as Eric describes in Chapter 12. Share it with the world on Instagram or TikTok. How did it feel to work on such a deadline? Describe the process.
4. If you are pursuing composition, try your hand at creating "a snake wearing pants" type of Style Sheet as Eric has described. Choose or write a text and identify your "Golden Brick." As you develop your composition, refer to your Style Sheet to maintain your focus on the Emotional Architecture of your piece.

Reflection and Insights

Have students journal or discuss their impression of the course using any of these questions or others that you or your students may devise.

- Describe how your perception of creativity or composition may have changed because of taking the class?
- Are you more or less likely to pursue creative ideas? Why or why not?
- What aspects of the course affected you the most? The least? Why or why not?
- Did your attitude toward music change because of this class? Why or why not?
- Are you more likely or less likely to pursue music in the future? Why or why not?
- Would you change this course to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Student Guide



Introduction

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